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U.S. PTO

PATENT APPLICATION

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE  
UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL LETTER

jc551 U.S. PTO  
09/118684  
07/17/98

Atty./Agent Docket No.: Kevin B. Jackson--SC10508C P1

Mailing Date: July 17, 1998

Express Mail Label No.: E1741055881US

To: Assistant Commissioner for Patents  
Box Patent Application  
Washington, D.C. 20231

Dear Sir:

Transmitted herewith for filing under 37 CFR 1.53 (b) is a Nonprovisional Utility Patent:

New Application; or a  Continuation,  Division, or  Continuation-in-Part (CIP)  
Application of prior US application No. 09/088,005, filed on June 1, 1998, having  
US Examiner Unknown, in Group Art Unit 2731 : of

Inventor(s): Steven M. Domer  
Jeffery E. Bills

For (Title): **IMAGING CIRCUIT AND METHOD OF SPATIAL  
COMPENSATION**

This transmittal letter has 2 total pages.

Enclosed are:

2 sheets of drawings, along with 13 pages of specification and claims,

1 Oath or Declaration Combined with Power of Attorney (2 pages)  
 X Newly Executed (original or copy)  
 Copy from a prior application (if this is a Continuation/Division with no new matter)  
 Statement deleting named inventor(s) in prior application if this is a  
Continuation/Division (See 37 CFR 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).)  
 Consider as the above Statement, Please delete as inventors for this application:  
the following inventors named in the prior application: \_\_\_\_\_.

A certified copy of a \_\_\_\_\_ (non-US) application  
S/N \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_, having a filing date of \_\_\_\_\_, and foreign priority to  
this non-US application for the present application is hereby claimed under 35 USC 119.

An Assignment Transmittal Letter and Assignment of the invention to MOTOROLA, INC.

An Information Disclosure Statement (IDS), with        PTO-1449, and  
       citation copies.

Preliminary Amendment

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## Instructions:

Incorporation by Reference (for Continuation/Division application) The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which a copy of the oath or declaration is supplied, is considered as being part of the disclosure of the accompanying application and is hereby incorporated by reference therein.

Since the present application is based on a prior US application, please amend the specification by adding the following sentence before the first sentence of the specification: "The present application is based on prior US application No. 09/088,005, filed on June 1, 1998, which is hereby incorporated by reference, and priority thereto for common subject matter is hereby claimed."

Please cancel filed claims \_\_\_\_\_.

The filing fee is calculated as follows:

## CLAIMS AS FILED, LESS ANY CANCELED BY AMENDMENT

	NUMBER OF CLAIMS	NUMBER EXTRA	RATE	FEE
TOTAL CLAIMS	16- 20 =		X \$22	= \$0.00
INDEPENDENT CLAIMS	3- 3 =		X \$82	= \$0.00
MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIMS		\$270	= \$0.00	
			BASIC FEE	= \$ 790.00
			TOTAL FILING FEE	= \$ 790.00

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Date: 17 July 1998Signature: Kevin B. Jackson

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## IMAGING CIRCUIT AND METHOD OF SPATIAL COMPENSATION

## Background of the Invention

5 The present invention relates in general to semiconductors, and more particularly to integrated imaging circuits.

10 High resolution imaging systems such as scanners and digital cameras capture images by projecting light from an object through a lens and onto an optical sensor. A low manufacturing cost and low power operation is achieved by fabricating the sensor on a semiconductor die configured with an array of photoactive sensing devices such as charge-coupled devices, photodiodes, or phototransistors. The photoactive devices respond to the light projected from the object by generating proportional pixel signals which are processed through an imaging circuit to produce viewable imaging data.

15 In most imaging systems, different regions of the sensor have different responses to the light projected from the image. That is, photoactive devices in different regions of the sensor generate pixel signals of different amplitudes even when the light intensity is the same. Such nonuniformities can be caused by semiconductor process 20 variations across the die, aberrations in a focusing lens or by thermal gradients across the sensor. As a result, objectionable shadows are present in portions of the 25 displayed image.

30 Hence, there is a need for an improved imaging system that can compensate for different responses to light across different regions of an optical sensor.

## Brief Description of the Drawings

35 FIG. 1 illustrates a partially exploded isometric view of an image capturing system in accordance with the present invention; and

40 FIG. 2 illustrates a processing circuit for pixel signals in accordance with the present invention.

## Detailed Description of the Drawings

In the figures, elements having the same reference number have similar functionality.

45 FIG. 1 illustrates a partially exploded isometric view of a scanner 10 or similar image capturing system, including an image capture device 20, a computer 21 and a display device 22. Scanner 10 captures an image 12 for converting to digital data in a format recognizable for displaying by display device 22, as will be described.

50 A package 24 houses an imaging integrated circuit 26 having a lid 28 with a transparent portion 30 for transmitting light reflected from image 12. The light is projected onto an optical sensor 32 formed in a region of integrated circuit 26. Optical sensor 32 is formed as an array of photoactive semiconductor devices designated as photodetectors functioning as pixel sensors.

55 Transparent portion 30 operates as a focusing lens to focus light in a focal plane in which optical sensor 32 is disposed. Alternatively, focusing is achieved with an external lens (not shown) interposed between image 12 and sensor 32. Light projected through transparent portion 30 onto the photodetectors of sensor 32 produces analog pixel signals proportional to the light intensity. In many

65 systems, imperfections in transparent portion 30 and/or an external lens result in the intensity of light being nonuniformly transmitted across sensor 32. In other systems, nonuniform pixel signals can be generated in different regions 52 of sensor 32 even when the light  
70 intensity is the same, due to thermal gradients or process variations across integrated circuit 26. Such an uneven response of the photodetectors produces objectionable shading of portions of a displayed image.

75 To compensate for this problem, sensor 32 is subdivided into localized regions 52 within which pixel signals of substantially equal amplitudes are generated when equal light intensities are projected on different photodetectors. The physical size of the regions 52 is determined by the variation in the response to light across sensor 32. When the variation is large, sensor 32 is  
80 divided into smaller regions 52 to ensure that the photodetectors within a region 52 have substantially equal light responses. Differences in amplitudes of pixel signals generated by photodetectors in different regions 52 are compensated with a signal processing circuit 34 to  
85 reduce or eliminate shadowing. The response to light across sensor 32 depends on lens quality, thermal gradients, etc., of scanner 10.

90 In the embodiment of FIG. 1, scanner 10 is monochromatic, i.e., senses in black and white, and sensor 32 is configured with one row of 2,752 photodetectors disposed in forty-three regions 52. Hence, each region 52 includes sixty-four photodetectors and their associated selection circuitry. When used in a digital camera, sensor  
95 32 typically is implemented as a row/column matrix of photodetectors rather than as a single row.

Note that numerous other configurations are possible for sensor 32. For example, when scanner 10 is configured to capture color images, color filters can be interposed between an image and sensor 32 so that each photodetector responds to light of a particular color. In an RGB system, sensor 32 may include one row of devices responsive to red light, another row responsive to blue light and a third row responsive to green light. Partitioning into regions can occur within or among these rows to obtain the advantages of the present invention whether or not photodetectors responsive to different colors are combined into the same region. If desired, each photoactive device can be disposed in its own region 52, so that processing circuit 34 compensates for sensitivity differences among any of the photodetectors in sensor 32.

Since a given lens design, lighting system, or process variation often has a predictable and systematic type of shading across a die, the partitioning of sensor 32 into regions 52 typically occurs when scanner 10 is being characterized during its development phase. Alternatively, scanner 10 can be configured with calibration circuitry to allow a user to adjust the number of regions as needed.

Signal processing circuit 34 receives user selected starting and ending addresses on a node 45 from computer 21 to define the scan boundaries. These addresses are used to generate address data on conductors 35 and 36 for selecting the photodetectors whose pixel signals are provided on a bus 38. Circuit 34 processes the pixel signals to produce digital imaging data at a wire bond 37 and a lead 39 of package 24. In alternative applications, parallel imaging data is provided on multiple leads and transferred on a bus to computer 21.

130 Computer 21 is a digital signal processing device programmed to generate the starting and ending scan addresses and to provide control data to circuit 34. Each region 52 of sensor 32 has a corresponding value of control data which is used to compensate for differences in the sensitivity of photodetectors as will be described.

135 Computer 21 also receives the digital imaging data from circuit 34 for formatting and viewing on output device 22. Output device 22 is shown as a monitor, but can be another type of device such as a printer, a storage device such as a disk drive, etc.

140 FIG. 2 illustrates a schematic diagram of integrated circuit 26 including optical sensor 32 and processing circuit 34. Pixel signals generated by sensor 32 are provided in parallel on bus 38. The pixel signals are selected for converting to a serial stream on a node 65 by a two stage multiplexing circuit. The first multiplexing stage includes a multiplexer 62 for selecting one of forty-three regions 52 of sensor 32. Selection is controlled by address data provided on six bit bus 36 from a pixel address generator 66. Hence, multiplexer 62 has 2,752 inputs coupled to bus 38 and sixty-four outputs coupled to a sixty-four bit bus 71 for providing sixty-four pixel signals generated within a selected region. Multiplexer 62 is implemented as a decoding matrix of analog switching devices such as transmission gates to operate as a one of forty-three analog multiplexer.

145 150 155 160 The second multiplexing stage includes a one of sixty-four analog multiplexer 63 for selecting from among pixel signals within a region 52 selected by multiplexer 62. Inputs of multiplexer 63 are coupled to bus 71 for receiving the pixel signals and a selected pixel signal is

provided on node 65. Multiplexer 63 includes a matrix of analog switching devices similar to the matrix of multiplexer 62. Pixel signals within a region 52 are selected with address data provided on six bit bus 35 from 165 pixel address generator 66.

Pixel address generator 66 receives the starting and ending addresses from computer 21 on node 45 for setting the boundaries of a scan. Pixel address generator 66 includes one or more programmable counters which are 170 incremented with a system clock SYSCLK to produce the series of binary pixel addresses on buses 35 and 36. The binary pixel addresses are applied to multiplexers 62 and 63 to produce a serial stream of pixel signals on node 65.

A correlated double sampling (CDS) circuit 68 operates 175 as a sample and hold sense amplifier that extracts projected light information from the pixel signals while rejecting system noise. An input is coupled to node 65 to sense the pixel signals to provide a stream of analog sense signals at an output coupled to a node 70. The sample and hold functions are timed from system clock SYSCLK to 180 synchronize with the rate of the pixel signals. Correlated double sampling is a standard method used in imaging circuits to sense pixel signals. Briefly stated, selected a pixel signal has two portions: a reference (or dark) 185 portion whose amplitude is indicative of a zero light condition, and a signal (or light) portion whose amplitude is indicative of the intensity of the light projected on the photodetector to generate the pixel signal. The reference level is sampled by CDS circuit 68 on one 190 transition of SYSCLK and the signal level is sampled on another SYSCLK transition while holding the reference level. CDS circuit 68 subtracts the reference level from

the signal level and amplifies the difference to produce an analog sense signal on node 70. Hence, analog sense  
195 signals contain information regarding the intensity of light projected on corresponding photodetectors.

A programmable gain amplifier (PGA) 72 operates as an analog amplifier whose gain is set with digital CONTROL data received at a control input at a node 74. A signal  
200 input is coupled to node 70 to receive the stream of analog sense signals and an output at a node 78 provides an imaging signal stream. PGA 72 amplifies each analog sense signal to a gain whose magnitude is set by the applied value of CONTROL data. Each region 52 has a corresponding value of CONTROL data which typically is set when scanner 10 is characterized 10 during its development phase. Alternative methods of setting CONTROL values can take advantage of the inherent mapping between areas of a displayed image and regions 52 of sensor 32. For example, a user can capture a white image and view it on display device 22 while manually adjusting CONTROL data through a graphics interface to compensate for shadowy areas created by different responses to light of different regions 52.

A memory circuit 76 stores CONTROL data transferred  
215 from computer 21 on conductor 43. An output is coupled to node 74 for providing CONTROL data to PGA 72. Note that pixel addresses are applied to memory circuit 76 to retrieve CONTROL data while being applied to multiplexers 62 and 63 to select pixel signals, so the same pixel  
220 addresses that control multiplexers 62 and 63 are used to access CONTROL data from memory circuit 76. Therefore, as analog sense signals are amplified through PGA 72, the correct CONTROL data is retrieved from memory circuit 76 on node 74 to dynamically alter the gain of PGA 72 to

225 compensate for the different sensitivities of regions 52 to light. In effect, altering the gain "on the fly" spatially compensates for these nonuniformities across sensor 32 to produce higher quality displayed images.

230 The imaging signal stream on node 78 is applied to the input of an analog to digital converter (ADC) 80 for converting to digital imaging data at an output coupled to wire bond 39. Recall that the imaging signal stream is provided at a rate set by SYSCLK. To synchronize with the imaging signal stream, ADC 80 is clocked with SYSCLK to convert the imaging signal stream to digital imaging data as it is received.

235  
240  
245 By now it should be appreciated that the present invention provides a circuit and method of compensating for a nonuniform response across an optical sensor. The nonuniformity results in pixel signals generated in different regions of the optical sensor having different amplitudes for a given intensity of light. The optical sensor is divided into physical regions small enough to ensure that the photodetectors within each region generate substantially equal pixel signals for the given light intensity. A processing circuit compensates for different responses among different regions with a programmable gain amplifier whose gain is adjusted when the regions in which the pixel signals are generated changes.

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## CLAIMS

1. An imaging device, comprising:

an optical sensor having an output for providing pixel signals generated in response to light projected onto regions of the optical sensor; and

255 regions of the optical sensor; and

an amplifier having a first input coupled for receiving the pixel signals, a first output for providing an imaging signal, and a control input coupled for receiving control data to amplify the pixel signals to different gains when the pixel signals are generated in different regions of the optical sensor.

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2. The imaging device of claim 1, wherein the optical sensor includes a plurality of photoactive devices disposed in the regions of the optical sensor.

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3. The imaging device of claim 2, wherein the optical sensor has an address input coupled for receiving pixel addresses for selecting the pixel signals in different orders.

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4. The imaging device of claim 3, further comprising a memory circuit for storing the control data, the memory circuit having an address input coupled for receiving the pixel addresses and an output coupled to the control input of the amplifier.

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280 5. The imaging device of claim 3, wherein the optical  
sensor includes a multiplexer having a first input coupled  
to the output of the optical sensor, and a selection input  
coupled to the address input of the optical sensor for  
selecting among photoactive devices of the optical sensor  
to provide the pixel signals.

285 6. The imaging device of claim 1, further comprising  
an analog to digital converter having an input coupled for  
receiving the imaging signal and an output for providing  
imaging data.

290 7. A method of capturing an image, comprising the  
step of altering a gain of pixel signals through an  
amplifier in response to control data to compensate for a  
difference in response to light projected on different  
regions of an optical sensor.

295 8. The method of claim 7, further comprising the step  
of projecting light from the image onto first and second  
regions of the optical sensor to generate first and second  
pixel signals, respectively.

300 9. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of  
altering includes the steps of:  
amplifying the first pixel signal through the  
amplifier to a first gain; and  
305 amplifying the second pixel signal through the  
amplifier to a second gain.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the first pixel  
310 signal has a first amplitude when a light intensity is  
projected on the first region of the optical sensor, the  
second pixel signal has a second amplitude less than the  
first amplitude when the light intensity is projected on  
the second region of the optical sensor, and the step of  
315 amplifying the second pixel signal includes the step of  
amplifying the second pixel signal through the amplifier to  
the second gain greater than the first gain.

11. The method of claim 8, further comprising the  
320 step of selecting the first and second regions of the  
optical sensor with address data to produce the first and  
second pixel signals.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of  
325 selecting includes the step of multiplexing the first and  
second pixel signals with the address data.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising the  
steps of:

330       storing the control data; and  
              retrieving the control data with the address data.

14. The method of claim 7, further comprising the  
steps of:

335       amplifying the pixel signals through the amplifier to  
              produce an imaging signal; and  
              converting the imaging signal to digital imaging data  
              for viewing.

15. An image capturing method, comprising the steps

340 of:

sensing light projected on first and second regions of an optical sensor to produce first and second pixel signals;

345 setting a gain of an amplifier with first control data for amplifying the first pixel signal; and

altering the gain of the amplifier with second control data for amplifying the second pixel signal to equalize the responses of the first and second regions of the optical sensor to the light.

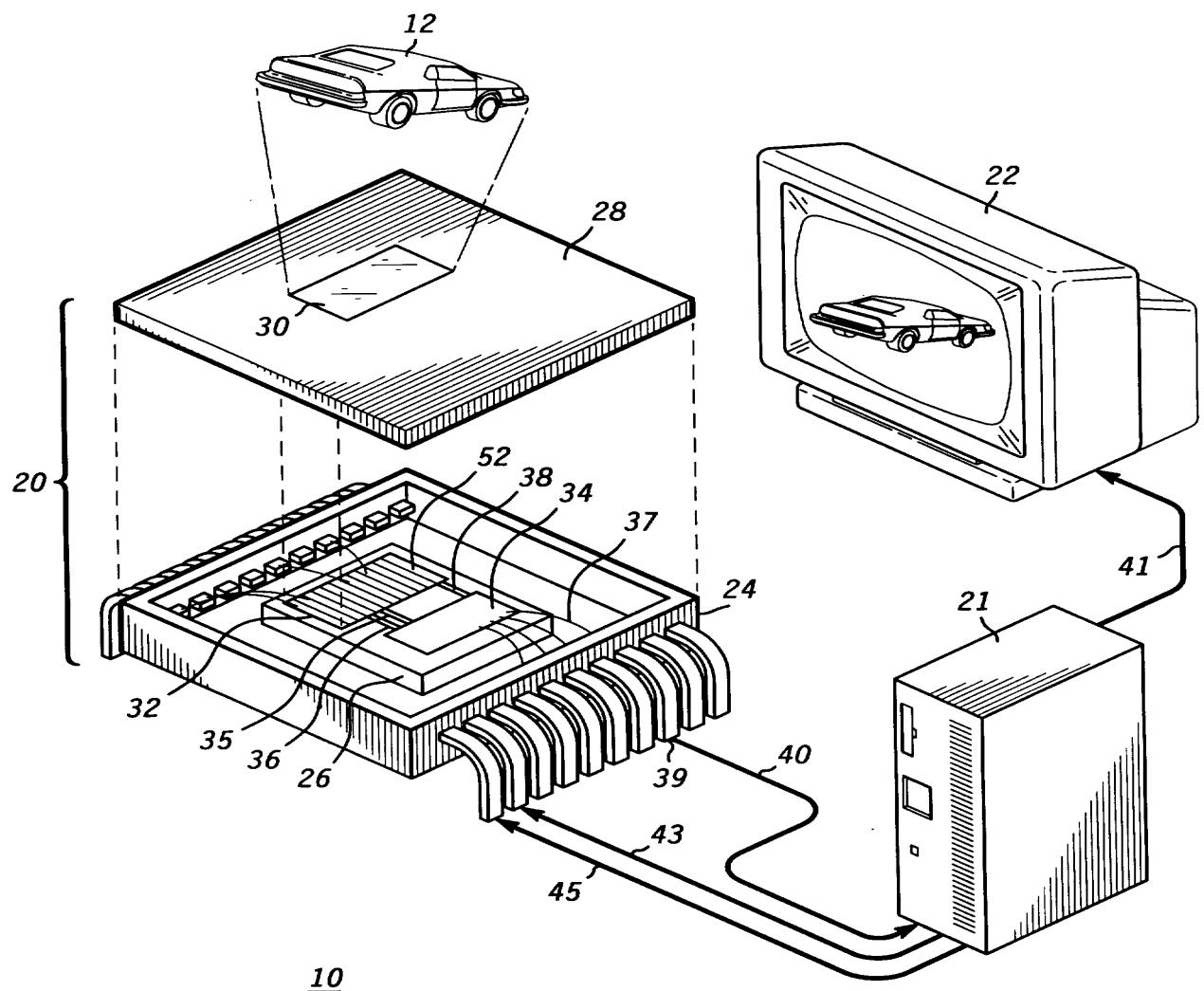
350

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the first and second pixel signals are amplified to produce a monochrome imaging signal.

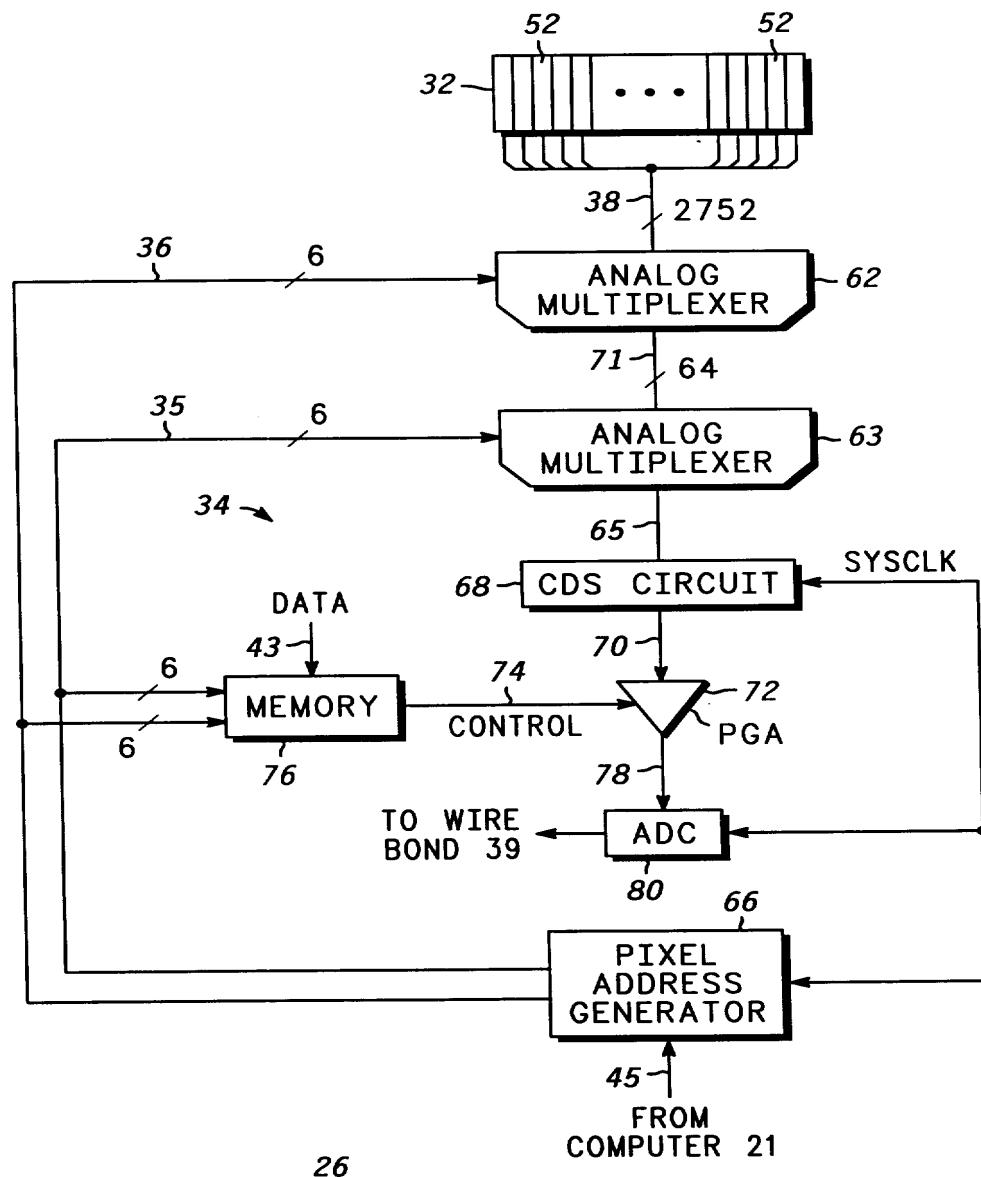
355 IMAGING CIRCUIT AND METHOD OF SPATIAL COMPENSATION

### Abstract of the Disclosure

360 An imaging system (10) and method compensate for different amplitudes of pixel signals generated by photoactive devices in an optical sensor (32) whose responses to projected light are not uniform. The sensor is divided into regions (52) such that the response of the photoactive devices within a region are substantially equal. A processing circuit (34) compensates for different responses among different regions with a programmable gain amplifier (72) whose gain is dynamically adjusted when pixel signals generated in different regions are received.



**FIG. 1**



**COMBINED DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY  
FOR PATENT APPLICATION**

Attorney Docket **SC10508C P1**

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name.

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below), or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below), of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled **IMAGING CIRCUIT  
AND METHOD OF SPATIAL COMPENSATION**, the specification of which is attached hereto unless the following box is checked:

Application was filed on \_\_\_\_\_  
as Application No. \_\_\_\_\_  
and was amended on \_\_\_\_\_.

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to the examination of this application in accordance with Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, §1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, § 119(a)-(d) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

Prior Foreign Application(s)		Priority Claimed
(Number)	(Country)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (Day/Month/Year Filed)
(Number)	(Country)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (Day/Month/Year Filed)

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, § 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

(Application Number)	(Filing Date)
(Application Number)	(Filing Date)

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, § 120 of any United States application(s) listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, § 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose

information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, § 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application.

(Application Number) (Filing Date) (Status - patented, pending, abandoned)

(Application Number) (Filing Date) (Status - patented, pending, abandoned)

I hereby appoint the following attorney(s) and/or agent(s) to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith:

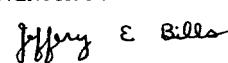
Vincent B. Ingrassia, Reg. No. 25,732; Miriam Jackson, Reg. No. 33,911; Robert D. Atkins, Reg. No 34,288; Daniel R. Collopy, Reg. No. 33,667; Sharon K. Coleman, Reg. No. 39,146; Robert F. Hightower, Reg. No. 36,163; Kevin B. Jackson, Reg. No 38,502; Rennie William Dover, Reg. No. 36,503; George C. Chen, Reg. No. 39,935.

Address all telephone calls to Mr. Kevin B. Jackson at telephone no. (602) 441-4303.

Address all correspondence to Vincent B. Ingrassia, Motorola, Inc., Intellectual Property Department - Suite R3108, P.O. Box 10219, Scottsdale, AZ 85271-0219.

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

FULL NAME OF FIRST INVENTOR: FIRST MIDDLE LAST			INVENTOR'S SIGNATURE:	DATE:
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## IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re application of: : Date: July 17, 1998

**Steven M. Domer et al.**

Docket No.: SC10508CP01

Filed: CONCURRENTLY HEREWITH

For: **IMAGING CIRCUIT AND METHOD OF SPATIAL COMPENSATION**EI741055881US

"Express Mail" Label Number

July 17, 1998

Date of Deposit

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PAPER OR FEE IS BEING DEPOSITED WITH THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE AS "EXPRESS MAIL POST OFFICE TO ADDRESSEE" SERVICE UNDER 37 CFR 1.10 ON THE DATE INDICATED ABOVE AND IS ADDRESSED TO THE HONORABLE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20231.

LISA MARIE HOPKINSON

Name of Person Mailing Paper or Fee

Lisa Marie Hopkinson  
SignaturePRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Honorable Assistant Commissioner for Patents  
Washington DC 20231

SIR:

Please consider the above-identified patent application in view of the amendments presented below.

IN THE FIGURES

Figure 3 is added to the application and is attached to this Preliminary Amendment.

IN THE SPECIFICATION

On page 2, line 39, change "invention." to "invention; and".

On page 2, after line 39, insert text as follows:

--FIG. 3 illustrates an alternate embodiment of a processing circuit for pixel signals in accordance with the present invention.--

On page 6, lines 183-184, change "selected a" to "a selected".

Insert the following text after page 8, line 236, after "as it is received."

--FIG. 3 illustrates a schematic diagram of imaging integrated circuit 26 in an alternate embodiment, including optical sensor 32 and signal processing circuit 34.

Optical sensor 32 includes 2,752 photodetectors coupled to a CDS circuit 168 having  $2,752 \times 2 = 5,504$  sample and hold (S/H) amplifiers. In other words, each photodetector is coupled to two S/H amplifiers, a first S/H amplifier sampling the dark level on one transition of SYSCLK and holding the dark level while a second S/H amplifier samples the light level. The dark levels generated by the photodetectors are

concurrently sampled on one SYSCLK transition, and the light levels are sampled on another SYSCLK transition. Hence, the S/H amplifiers perform a correlated double sampling function for the photodetectors.

The dark and light signal levels are provided on separate conductors of bus 38. Hence, bus 38 includes 5,504 conductors to conduct the reference and signal levels for 2,752 photodetectors. By performing the correlated double sampling function in parallel on all of the photodetectors, pixel signals can be processed at a higher rate or, as an alternative, the frequency of SYSCLK can be reduced to reduce switching and other system noise while maintaining the processing rate of pixel signals.

A multiplexer 162 receives pixel addresses on bus 36 to select one of the forty-three regions 52 of sensor 32 in a fashion similar to multiplexer 62 shown in FIG. 2. Hence, the dark and light signal levels on bus 38 are provided at 5,504 inputs of a multiplexer 162. These dark and light signal levels are routed through separate decoding matrices within multiplexer 162 and provided on separate conductors of a bus 171. Hence, multiplexer 162 provides sixty-four dark levels and sixty-four light levels generated within a selected region on to one hundred twenty-eight outputs coupled to a one hundred twenty-eight conductor bus 171.

A one of sixty-four analog multiplexer 163 receives a pixel address on bus 35 and selects from among the dark and light levels of pixel signals within a region 52 selected by multiplexer 162. Multiplexer 163 has  $64 \times 2 = 128$  inputs coupled to bus 171 for routing the dark and light levels of selected pixel signals to nodes 161 and 165, respectively.

A PGA 172 performs a function similar to that of PGA 72 (FIG. 2). That is, PGA 172 receives a series of dark and light signal levels and amplifies their differences to produce an imaging signal stream at node 178.

A memory circuit 176, an ADC 180 and a pixel address generator 166 are configured to operate in a fashion similar to memory circuit 76, ADC 80 and pixel address generator 66, respectively, of FIG. 2.--

REMARKS

The parent case, serial number 09/088,005, was filed on June 1, 1998. No office actions are pending.

Please reconsider the present application in light of the foregoing amendments and remarks.

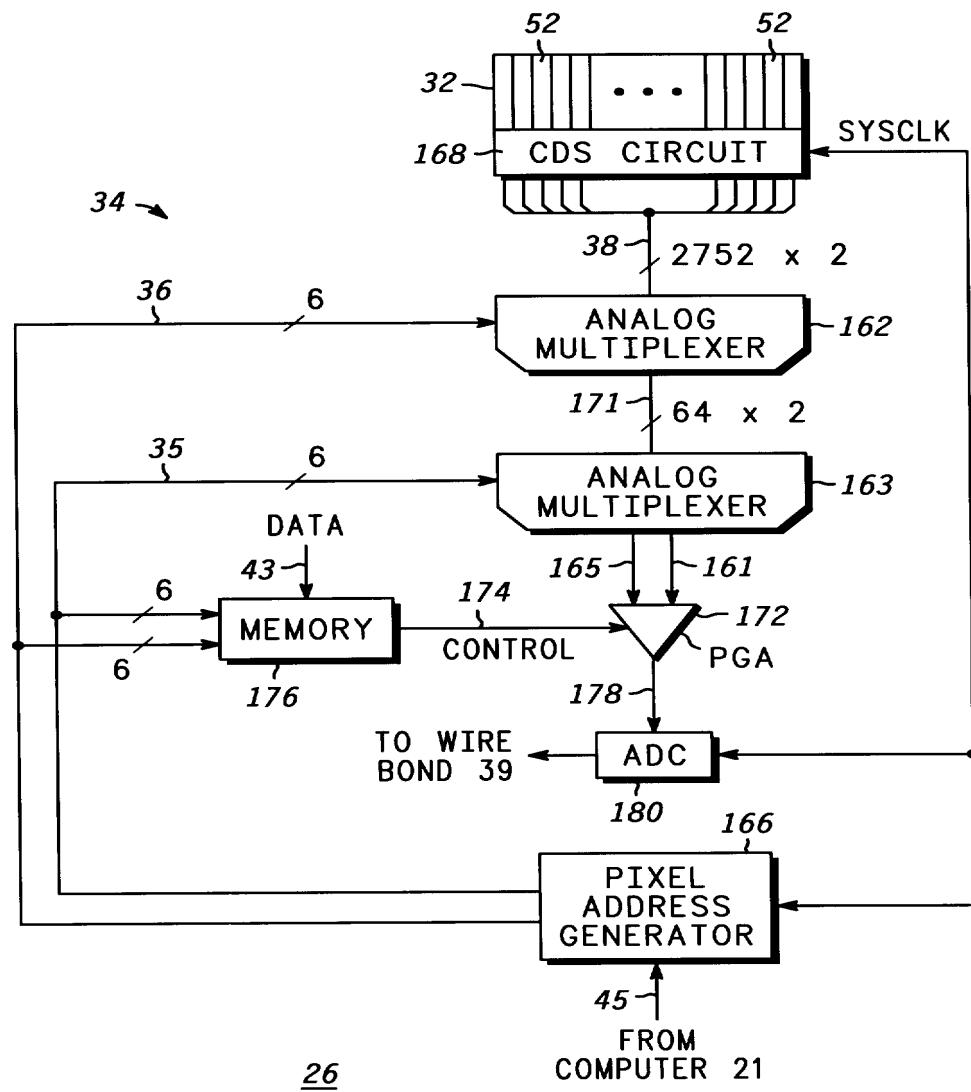
Respectfully submitted,

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**FIG. 3**